

strain being placed on our Guard and Reserve Forces. We are well aware that a major part of our military success in Iraq and Afghanistan has been because of the role played by reservists and Guard members who heeded the call to serve their country—for some, not once, not twice, but three times in Iraq and/or Afghanistan.

Since September 11, our reservists and National Guard members have been called upon with increasing frequency. From homeland security missions where they were absolutely essential in New York after 9/11, National Guard men and women patrolled and guarded our subways, the Amtrak lines in Penn Station, other places of importance. We have seen in so many other instances where they were called to duty here in our own homeland. We also know they have paid the ultimate sacrifice, losing their lives in serving the missions they were called to fulfill in Iraq and Afghanistan or being grievously wounded and returning home, having given their all to our country.

In New York we have over 30,000 members of the Guard and Reserves, and over 4,000 are currently deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. When I have visited with our activated reservists and National Guard in New York, I have been greatly impressed by their willingness and even eagerness, in some cases, to serve. But I have also heard about the strains they face, that their families have borne, that their businesses have endured. It is abundantly clear we are having some difficulty in recruitment and retention of the Guard and Reserve because of the extraordinary stresses being placed on these very dedicated individuals. Now more than ever, we need to address the needs of our Guard and Reserve members. The general of the Army Reserves, General Helmly, has expressed concern about whether we are going to be able to meet our needs for the Reserve component.

The legislation Senator GRAHAM and I have been working on for 2 years is bipartisan. It is not a party issue. It is a core American issue. Our TRICARE legislation allows Guard and Reserve members the option of enrolling full time in TRICARE, getting the family health insurance coverage that is offered to active-duty military personnel. The change would offer health care stability to families who lose coverage under their employers' plans when a family member is called to active duty. In fact, one of the most shocking statistics was that about 25 percent of our active-duty Guard and Reserve had some medical problems, but the numbers were particularly high for the Guard and Reserve because so many of these—primarily but not exclusively—young people either had jobs which didn't offer health insurance or worked for themselves and could not afford health insurance. So when they were activated and reported, they were not medically ready to be deployed. This is not simply the right thing to

do; this is part of our military readiness necessity.

The legislation addresses these critical issues. I am very grateful for Senator GRAHAM's leadership and the support of so many in this body. He and I will be working with Chairman WARNER and Ranking Member LEVIN and the rest of the Armed Services Committee to get our TRICARE legislation authorized in this year's Department of Defense authorization bill.

Finally, I know there are questions of cost that obviously have to be addressed. I don't think you can put a price on the military service these men and women have given our country. When I was in Iraq a couple of weeks ago, I was struck by how many men I saw with white hair. I think I was surprised there were so many people in their fifties, late fifties, who had been called back to active duty, members of the Individual Readiness Reserve. The men I spoke with had flown combat missions in Vietnam. There they were again, having left their families, left their employment, their homes, and doing their duty in Baghdad or Fallujah or Kirkuk and so many other places of danger.

We have an all-volunteer military. That all-volunteer military has to be given not only the respect it so deserves but the support and the resources it has earned.

I am hopeful we will have unanimous support in the Armed Services Committee to add this legislation, that we will have support from the administration and, in an overwhelming vote in both Houses of Congress, not give lip-service and rhetorical pats on the back to our Guard and Reserve members but show them in a tangible way that we appreciate and respect their service and we understand the strains they are living under and often their families are suffering under. One small way to show our appreciation as a nation is to make sure once and for all they and their families have access to health care.

It is a great pleasure to be working with Senator GRAHAM, and I look forward to successfully ensuring that this legislation is once and for all enacted, first in the Armed Services Committee and then on the floor of the Senate.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I will take up where my colleague left off. Before she leaves the floor, I acknowledge what a pleasure it has been to work with her and other members of the Democratic Party and the Republican Party to do something for our Guard and Reserve Forces. She has outlined very well what we are trying to do. It shows what can happen when the body will come together on an issue that should never divide us. Whether you are Republican or Democrat or independent, this war affects us all. No one asked the young men and women fighting the war their party

identification or affiliation or their political background when they went off to serve our Nation.

The least we can do as a body is stand behind them and their families to provide a benefit they need.

We had a hearing yesterday, to build upon what Senator CLINTON said. We had the chief of the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, Reserve components, and the Naval Reserve, and we talked about the stress on the force in terms of the Reserve community. We have 175,000 people today who have experienced duty in this war from the Guard and Reserve. Forty percent of the people in Iraq and Afghanistan are guardsmen and reservists. We could not fight without them.

This is the biggest utilization of the Guard and Reserve since World War II. The skill set they bring to the fight is indispensable. There are civil affairs people helping Afghan and Iraqi officials set up a democracy. We have medical personnel and many others who are indispensable. The military police are predominantly guardsmen and reservists, and they are indispensable in Iraq and Afghanistan. They have done a terrific job.

The reason we are involved in this legislation and we have so much bipartisan support for what we are trying to do is the Guard and Reserve is the only group of part-time Federal employees—and as a guardsman or reservist, you work for the Federal Government. You also work for the State government, but you have a dual status. Reservists are part of the Federal military, the DOD. They are the only group in the whole Federal Government that is not eligible for some form of health care from the Federal Government.

A temporary employee in your office or my office, somebody working in a temporary capacity, is able to sign up for Federal health care benefits that we enjoy. They have to pay a premium. A part-time worker is able to sign up for Federal health care benefits. The only group that works part time and doesn't get any benefits is the Guard and Reserve. The one thing we found from the hearing is that is a mistake. At least 10 percent of the people being called to active duty from the Guard and Reserve are unable to be deployed because of health care problems. About 30 percent of the people in the Guard and Reserve have no private health care insurance. So from a ratings point of view, about 10 percent of the force is taken out of the fight without a shot being fired. That makes no readiness sense. The health care network for the Guard and Reserve today is not doing the job in terms of making the force fit and ready to serve.

When a person is deployed from the Guard and Reserve, they leave behind a family more times than not. Half of the people going into the fight from the Guard and Reserve suffer a pay reduction, having no continuity of health care or predictability of what the benefits will be in a continuous fashion.